



All That Glitters

Story and art by Perry Munro

It was my turn to fill the “Piper” with water for a cup, and as I knelt down to draw the water from the pool, something on the bottom of the river glittered and caught my eye. I picked it up and called to Rick, “The guy at the float plane dock was right!” It was a gold nugget, straight from the river, fulfilling a prophecy made a week earlier.

The winter before, Rick Penney, my longtime friend and fishing companion, called and asked if I wanted to join a party traveling to the south coast of Newfoundland for salmon. It was a new river for me, and since new fishing destinations always excite me, with fresh challenges and new pools to cast for Atlantic salmon, and the joy of sharing it with a friend, the answer was, “you bet.” Plans were set in motion and finalized by spring. The months that passed seemed a long time, but July finally came.

Panic—we were late! Pulling into the Kings County Municipal airport in Waterville, Nova Scotia, we were confronted by our fishing companions standing around anxious to depart in our rented plane. Without much ado, and even introductions held in abeyance, we threw our gear and our bodies aboard. In a few minutes, our pilot and fellow fisherman Carl Ross had us in the air, pointed toward Newfoundland.

Once the plane leveled off, I recognized the co-pilot as my leader in the lions patrol of the Wolfville scout troop many jamborees ago; I was the seconder, and I couldn’t remember if I’d

been a happy camper or not. Pete Connelly had given up his post as patrol leader and had become a doctor. That I knew, but a co-pilot too? I was soon introduced to the other man in our plane, Vic, an instructor at the local community college. At New Glasgow we picked up the last fisherman, John, and his gear, and we were soon on our way to Deer Lake.

Once we landed in Deer Lake, we parked the aircraft and unloaded our gear into a taxi and departed for the Float plane dock in Pasadena. The second aircraft could take only three of us at a time, and since Rick and myself got the second trip, we gathered our gear together and settled down for a wait. I pulled my felt hat down over my eyes and had just started to snooze when I heard a voice. “Where ya headin’, me son?”

“To the south coast,” I replied.

“So it’s gold you’d be after!”

I looked up and saw a man who had obviously spent a great deal of time in the outdoors. When I looked at my clutter of gear in army bags, with its overflow spilling out the corners, and my old bush jacket with floppy felt hat, I realized he had mistaken me for a prospector—just as he obviously was.

“No. Silver,” I said.

“There’s no silver down there, only gold!”

“Silver from the sea,” I responded. As soon as he recognized his mistake, we both had a good laugh.

People who describe Newfoundland as “The Rock” must

have flown over the plateau that covers the southern part of the island. It is an amazing place, a place of moose, caribou, bears, bogs, lakes and rocks, rocks, and more rock. It sounds boring, but it most certainly is not; it is spectacular, and every time I cross it by plane I know I feel I am a traveler in a truly wild place.

Dropping over the edge of the plateau, you come down into forested fiords, with rivers leading to the sea. Dropping toward the sea level, the sides look like the edge of a mountain. I could make out a speck in the distance, which grew into a boat, waiting to take us to our accommodations for the first night, a yellow house in a small outport called North Bay. The Lapoile River empties the bay right by the house.

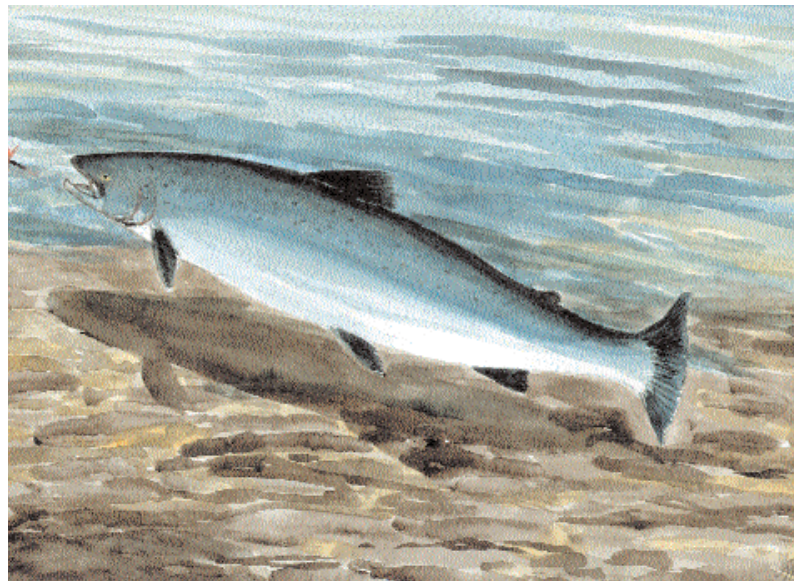
The first thing Rick and I unpacked after landing was our fishing gear. Dinner was being served after dark, so an hour before the appointed time, we waded into the river by the house. I had a pull on the third cast, but no fish; a few casts later, a repeat and the fish was gone. I called out to Rick about my luck, or lack thereof, and he answered that he was having the same.

Just then something hit my leg several times. For the next hour, schools of salmon moved upstream. Because of the lack of taking fish, and the numbers that hit our legs, we waded back to the riverbank and just watched in amazement. Talk about being in the right place at the right time. We had been traveling by car, plane, and boat since daybreak, and we were over-tired. After dinner we retired.

"After battle, sleep is best" goes the old saying, but another way of looking at it is, "Before battle, sleep is impossible." Such was my night's sleep. Visions of pools I'd never seen, teeming with salmon I had seen, made sleep an elusive quest. It was like opening day of trout season, and I was a kid again.

At the end of a restless night, dawn must come. And come it did, with all the commotion of breakfast, and more packing. Our travel wasn't over—we had to go upstream to the camp at Big Salmon Hole pool, a distance of three miles. Rick and I decided to fish up to the camp rather than ride with the tractor and trailer. Besides, with the supplies and equipment, there really wasn't enough room for all of us to ride up—someone had to walk up. It was a tough job, sure, but we headed out with our fishing rods in hand.

The lower section of the valley was flat, so the river ribboned and formed different branches that separated and rejoined the main river, before some branched off again to rejoin further down. This meant there was little, if any, hold-



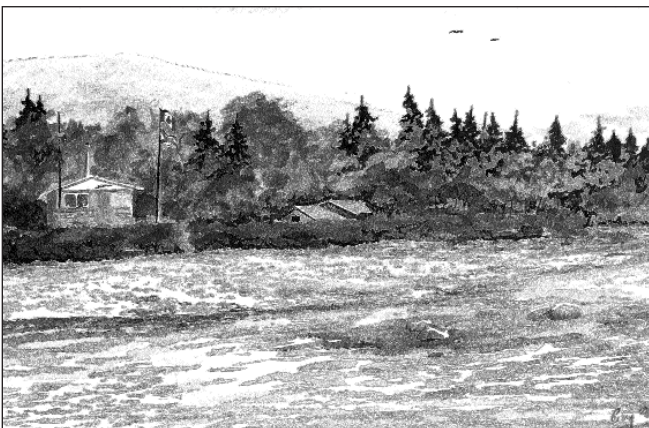
ing water for a mile or so. As the gradient of the river increased, the river became one again, with formed pools. Here were the salmon, and they were taking.

We had been told that the camp rule was two salmon a day; letting fish go was not allowed. The reason offered for this was that if you hooked and released a salmon, another member of your party would be deprived of the opportunity to catch it. We killed a couple of salmon on the way up, but decided to wait until late afternoon for our second. Sounds a bit arrogant, I suppose, but you really had to be there. In our five days, I never fished before nine or after five, yet still retained my two salmon each day. It was one of the few times I have ever truly felt in the right place in the right moment.

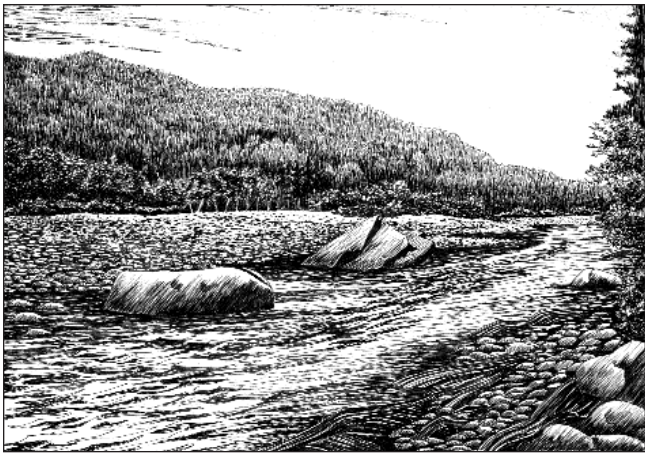
We started to experiment with the luxury of an abundance of fresh fish. How small a fly could we use? How many times could we pull a fly away before a fish refused to come again? To observe the behaviour of these fish in gin-clear is an experience I will always treasure. I was able to take the time to sketch and paint some of the pools, enjoying the moose, scenery, and the other pleasures I should enjoy on other trips, if only the fish would stop calling me away.

We had a great meal our first night in camp. After, I was asleep before my head hit the pillow. We all slept on bunks in the same room, and the guides slept in a separate cabin. Soon, I awoke in the dark, fearing for my life. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre was taking place in a remote cabin in Newfoundland—and I was in it. The cabin was shaking, as a chainsaw ripped through the walls. When I was fully awake, I realized that it was Carl snoring. I lay there and contemplated putting a pillow over his face, if only for a moment. Someone made a comment and I realized that Carl was the only one sleeping. Many solutions were suggested, but none could be applied, for humanitarian reasons. Finally, it fell to Pete to wake Carl and, if possible, keep him quiet until dawn. Personally, I had never heard snoring quite like this, either before or since. Carl, of course, didn't have any idea, but realized we would have to get used to it if we wanted to get home—he was the pilot after all. And that is what we did.

I awoke the following morning to the sound of someone speaking a foreign language in a highly excited voice. In the kitchen, Alex, the head guide, was on the CB talking to someone in the community. I knew this because I did hear the words "Lapoile" and "North Bay," but that was all I was able



La Poile Camp, Nfld.



Split Rock Pool, La Poile River, Nfld.

to make of the conversation. Two Newfoundlanders on a CB, in a hurry, is an experience for a mainlander. When Alex got off the CB I asked him what was up; in my mind, world war three might have broken out. No, it was far more important than that—the capelin had arrived.

The capelin is a small smelt-like fish that comes in on its spawning run from the ocean on a high tide. Arrangements had been made for the delivery of some capelin to the camp, so the members of the community who found themselves three miles upriver, guiding a group of mainlanders, could share in the bounty. In Mid-afternoon, a fisheries officer arrived at the camp with a bag of capelin over his shoulder. A pizza delivery wouldn't have surprised me more. Alex took delivery of the bag and assured us of a great feast that evening. The capelin were rolled in cornmeal and dropped in a smoking pan of fat on the stove. In the time it takes to describe this process, they were soon delivered to the table. The guides attacked the mountain of fish with glee, popping them into their mouths like finger food. I, however, and to my shame, confronted by a fish with tiny eyes on a little head and a bulging stomach, felt the need to pick at them. They tasted like spring smelts, only a little sweeter. When my plate was taken from the table with a little pile of heads on it, I knew I had missed the essence and the joy of the event. I swear—if I am ever fortunate enough to be in that position again, I will attack those capelin on the plate with gusto, and be rewarded with the feeling of community the guides had that night. Food is not just nourishment, after. In all cultures, eating is a meaningful social event. I will not make that mistake again!

I do not know what the ingredients are to a memorable fish; I do know it doesn't have to be huge, nor landed and that is usually is unexpected. The event is burned in your mind with a clarity that enables you to remember it years afterwards. You know it is a memorable fish when your wife knows the story as well as you. Such was the salmon on the ledge in front of the camp.

Alex, Rick, and myself were seated on the porch overlooking the Big Salmon Hole Pool enjoying a rest break after lunch, when we noticed a large salmon showing itself on a foam line on the far side of the river, along a ledge. When it showed itself several more times, I decided to give it a try.

Down I went to the water, positioning myself on the closest rock to the ledge. I tied on a White Wulff and started to work some line out. It was a difficult cast, and after I had out the necessary line, I made the cast. The fly landed and drifted along the edge of the foam in the path of the fish. When it


reached the spot, the fish made a perfect rise—head, back, and tail in slow motion—and refused it. A couple casts later came the same rise and the same end result. I considered changing flies, but decided to try once more with the dry fly. This time, a moment after the perfect rise, the fly disappeared and I set the hook. The fish surged and ran about ten yards and jumped, throwing the hook. My line went limp, and I reeled in and returned to the porch.

I may have lost the fish, but it has never left me.

Toward the end of the week, Rick and myself went out exploring upriver, away from the camp with the main pools, in search of new water. This allowed us to fish water that rarely saw flies, as well as reduce pressure on the pools around camp. To do this, we would have to travel through a strange geography which the guides called “the Yellow Mish (Marsh).” It was flat bog a few hundred feet above the river, in a depression in the side of the mountain; it was covered with plants and yellow flowers. Moose trails criss-crossed the bog; these trails took us across, too, but not without effort. When we returned to the river after crossing the Yellow Mish, we found a pool with an abundance of taking fish.

We looked upon the pool in amazement and decided on the spot to have a friendly contest—well, Rick thought it was going to be friendly. We named the pool “60 Second Pool,” and the rules were set. We got a fire going and put a piper on to boil. The deal was that you had to make a cup of coffee and set down to drink it, until the other person yelled, “Go”; then you had to put your cup down and hook a salmon in sixty seconds. If you failed, you sat back down and it became the other person's turn. It was spectacular fishing, full of action, fish, cat-calls, and hoots of diversion, and after it was over, quiet satisfaction. Oh yes, I forgot—Rick won.

We returned across the Yellow Mish with four salmon and a gold nugget. As it turned out, the prospector and I had both been right at the floatplane dock, and Rick and I returned to the camp with both the gold and the silver.

All the ingredients of a great fishing trip were here. Still the adventure continued, with more happenings later on, including a fog-bound, four-day stay in St. Pierre. This happened years ago. At the time, the camp at the Lapoile River was booked solid every year. The only way you could get in was if a regular couldn't make it and you were invited to take his place. Most people traveled to North Sydney, then took the ferry to Port aux Basques, to the coastal boat that travels the South Coast of Newfoundland. Sounds complicated, but it isn't. I went only once, but the trip left me with many good memories of good times in the company of good friends. Today, there is a new camp, which takes bookings. If you decide to go, I wish you a trip as memorable as mine. 

Postscript

Shortly after this trip, John passed away, and a few years later, Carl did as well. They are missed by their family and friends. I offer this poem to all the fishing companions we have lost over the years.

*I pray that I might fish until my dying day,
And when it comes to my last cast,
I then most humbly pray,
When in the Lord's safe landing net
And peacefully asleep,
That in his mercy,
I be judged good enough to keep.*